

**Agricultural Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes**  
**July 18, 2017**

Note: All “bolded” text is from the Agenda.

**Attendees:** Dave Weitzer, Chuck Schuster, Doug Lechliden, Peter Driscoll, Dennis Kamber, Michele Cropp, Eleanor Leek, Linda Lewis, Aliza Fishbein

**Guest:** Jane Evans

**Staff:** Jeremy Criss

During this meeting, the AAC held a moment of silence for George Lechliden, Doug’s father, and a pillar in our community. He served on this committee for many years and was a great friend strong advocate for the County farmers.

1. **Meeting Called to Order and Introductions**
2. **Approval of the May 16, 2017 AAC meeting minutes. There was no meeting in June.**  
(Lechliden, Driscoll)
3. **The MSCD District Manager Position and follow up from the interviews.**  
11 people applied for the position, 9 met the minimum qualifications as determined by HR. 5 applicants were recommended by HR, and were interviewed by the Soil Conservation District Board of Supervisors on July 14. The Board voted for John Zawitoski to be the next manager of the District. John will keep helping on Ag Preservation until his job is filled.
4. **The OAG is monitoring the County Council agenda for ZTA 16-02 regarding AR Zone-TDR requirements for Dwellings accessory to farming like Farm Tenant Dwellings. We are still waiting to see if the ZTA will be assigned a new number and start the public process over.**  
There has been no controversy since the public draft was distributed on December 5, 2016. Everyone appears to agree with the language. The Council will assign a new ZTA a new number next week. Then the public process will start over. This is good, having worked for a year to get to this point. Hopefully will get this introduced before recess, usually at the end of July.
5. **Please see the 2017 Farm Tour and Harvest Sale Brochures for July 22 & 23, 2017.**  
17 farms are open for visitation. It’s the 28<sup>th</sup> year!
6. **Bill 23-17 Animal Control-Performance Animal-Violations-**  
[http://www2.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcgportalapps/Press\\_Detail.aspx?Item\\_ID=21223](http://www2.montgomerycountymd.gov/mcgportalapps/Press_Detail.aspx?Item_ID=21223)  
**Press Release**  
**Public hearing Draft**  
[http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/Resources/Files/bill/2017/Packets/20170718\\_6.pdf](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/COUNCIL/Resources/Files/bill/2017/Packets/20170718_6.pdf) This Bill was introduced on June 27, 2017 to address complaints and concerns of animal cruelty during circus events in the County and the public hearing is July 18, 2017 at 1:30 pm. The Bill currently provides an exemption for domestic cats, dogs, cattle, swine sheep, goats, horses, donkeys and mules. A Press Release for the Bill 23-17 suggested the Bill 23-17 should provide an exemption for the City of Gaithersburg where the County Agricultural Center is located. The OAG asked Extension Educator-David Gordon to

**review the bill and recommend if additional domestic animals need to be added to the exemption. David recommended all the animals that are listed in the 2017 County Agricultural Fair catalog. The MC Farm Bureau has drafted a letter to the County Council for the July 18, 2017 public hearing a 1:30 pm. (Please see the attached letter from the Montgomery County Farm Bureau.)**

The way the bill is written, it does not apply to anything in Rockville or Gaithersburg. In the packet is a letter from the FB – the press release and fact sheet for the bill shows that Rockville and Gaithersburg are exempt.

Though it does seem like it could encompass the sharks, bear, kangaroo, etc. that sometimes the Fair include as exhibits.

Michele went to the public hearing today, which lead to her having more concerns than after having read the bill. It appears to be about a much bigger issue, and the bill is a crack in the door. Proponents of the bill want the bull hook outlawed, which is used in circuses for elephants, but looks like a longer version of a show stick that we use in 4-H and other livestock shows. Proponents of the bill stated that their real goal is to end all animal transport in small crates, reminiscent of a stock trailer. They mentioned “compassionate care” and want to ban animal performances and to teach our children that we need to “stop using animals for human use.” They cited different cities in the country that have passed similar legislation banning circuses since they abuse animals.

The only opponent of the bill at the open hearing didn’t seem to get a positive reception and came representing a circus that had been cited several times for animal misconduct.

It appears that all members of the Council save for one would vote for this bill. A proponent of the bill said that the Pope would support this bill and that other places that have these policies enacted are “enlightened.”

Jeremy emailed all members of the Council, informing them that AAC could not present testimony today because the committee is meeting this evening. He thanked Michele and the FB for taking the lead on this issue. The public safety committee meeting on this bill is scheduled for 9/11/17, comments must be in by 9/6/17.

#### What should AAC do on this bill?

Doug proposed that the AAC send a letter supporting the opposition to the bill that the FB has expressed. If the MC Ag Center and FB members come together, that represents a lot of votes. This bill will likely pass, but it is important to bring this issue into the light. HSUS has committed \$36 million to protesting and opposing the fairs and this bill is just a stepping stone. Michele will write another letter for 9/6/17.

Public Safety Committee hearings are not public hearings meaning additional testimony will only appear in the staff packet, but Michele is going to sign up to be called to the table. After the hearing, the committee will have a work session and take the public’s comments into consideration.

We need to figure out the position of the City of Gaithersburg, Michele will call the city manager to find out. Will Gaithersburg add this to their MOU of things they allow the County to take control over?

Doug pointed out that MAP will likely support the FB. Doug volunteered to speak at the hearing on behalf of AAC. Jeremy will make sure we have seats at the table.

Anticipate getting the same response from the Council as we got during the pesticide bill: “ag is exempt, why do we care?”

AAC will draft a letter and circulate it so we can all comment on it before it is finalized. *(Please note a letter dated August 2, 2017 was drafted, but never sent due to an agricultural group meeting that was scheduled on August 2, 2017. The group consisted of representatives from the following organizations-Montgomery County Agricultural Center, Inc Fair Board,*

*Montgomery County Farm Bureau, Montgomery County Agricultural Advisory Committee, and Montgomery Agricultural Producers.)*

- 7. The County Department of General Services has asked the OAG for a list of materials that farmers frequently salvage from miscellaneous sites that could be used to help with their farming operations. The DGS will cross reference the list and schedule an on-site visit for the Site 2 property in White Oak (Former WSSC Sludge Composting Facility). There are several large steel buildings that could be disassembled and reassembled into smaller agricultural buildings on farms.**

Jeremy has been trying to provide an opportunity for the County to provide building materials and equipment to make available to farmers for the Site 2 property in Calverton. It's from when WSSC had a sludge composting facility. WSSC cleaned up the property before the County took title. The County wants to build an FDA campus there. The buildings there are huge, several football fields put together, which can be disassembled and transported to farms to build smaller structures. There may be a field visit for farmers to go there. Jeremy is advocating that this be free for farmers, not as an auction. He is making a list of things that farmers could want from the property. Let Jeremy know if you are looking for something that you don't want to buy new.

- 8. There is a growing concern from the MCA and SCA questioning how the County Department of Permitting Services has approved applications for Agricultural Tourism events (Farm Weddings) on certain farms in the Agricultural Reserve. The question surrounds how these land uses have been approved based who owns the properties and whether the owners are the farmers engaged in farming. In determining whether a property and the use is allowed as part of Farming, the DPS evaluates the property regardless of who owns it. A property that is agriculturally assessed and agriculturally zoned is legally considered a farm by the DPS. There is a meeting scheduled with Executive staff on July 21, 2017 to discuss this growing concern of the MCA and SCA. A response is pending and it will reference the MNCPPC study on Agritourism that the County Council approved as part of the FY18 Operating Budget in the amount of \$50,000. Executive staff will participate in the working group assigned as part of the Agritourism study. Stay Tuned!**

We are very glad about DPS approving permits for various farms. MCA and SCA are unhappy with some of the properties they are approving. There is a letter in circulation by Tom Hartsock saying that land use decisions should be done based on who owns the property and whether they are engaged in farming. However, this is not what DPS does, they consider zoning, assessment, acreage, lay of the land, regardless of who owns the property.

SCA and MCA feel that if someone owns the farm and is leasing it for farming but is not engaged in agriculture directly, they should not be allowed to have weddings there. There is a meeting this Friday with the executive staff to respond to the letter. Jane added that the FB lists owners as agricultural, not just operators.

- 9. The Council President Roger Berliner introduced a resolution on Tuesday asking the County Council to formally take a stand opposing a new Potomac River bridge crossing. The proposed project would include extending Route 28 in Virginia to the portion of the Intercounty Connector (ICC) that is in Montgomery County. Council President Berliner's memo went on to state: "Montgomery County has long opposed another Potomac River bridge crossing from Northern Virginia to Montgomery County**

**because of the severe negative impacts such a project would have on our environment, our Agricultural Reserve, established residential neighborhoods and for promoting sprawl.” Stay Tuned!**

Every few years Loudon County talks about how they need another crossing of the Potomac River. Council President Berliner last week asked for the Council to take a stand opposing the latest proposal from Loudon for a bridge crossing. They want to connect 370 to the ICC to I-95. We will continue to monitor this matter as Virginians advocate for a crossing.

**10. The MCFB sponsored a Meet your farmer event for the 14<sup>th</sup> Legislative District at Waredaca on June 20, 2017. Senator Craig Zucker and Delegates Luedtke, Kaiser, and Queen all attended along with 35 farmers/residents. Everyone that attended felt it was a good meeting and information sharing opportunity. The MCFB is working to schedule a similar event for the 15 Legislative District. Stay tuned!**

There was 100% attendance on the legislative side – 35 farmers/residents who attended. The FB is working to have a similar event for the 15<sup>th</sup> legislative district. It could be expanded to some of the other districts as well.

**11. Status of the New Appointments to the AAC.**

There are 3 non-farmer positions on the AAC. Aliza and Dennis have requested reappointment. Eddie Kuhlman did not request reappointment, so we will need to replace him. From the list that has been submitted, have three non-farmers to choose from.

Of the farmer positions, Doug L. and Michele have both asked to be reappointed. Linda and Ben have finished their second terms and have requested a waiver for a third. Jane has applied. Laurie Larson has applied, and we need to have an equestrian representative.

If everyone gets their appointments, then we will have 12 farmers and 3 non-farmers completing the full AAC roster.

**12. Update on the Sugarland Road Broadband project-(See Attachment)**

In the packet is a letter from Berliner to Comcast trying to get Comcast to move forward on the project to address the needs of the residents. It was our understanding we had enough residents to justify the infrastructure investment, but for some reason the project has stalled.

Dave proposed sending a letter from AAC to Comcast, to discuss how farmers in the area with businesses are interested. Of the 97 residents who signed express letters of interest, 15 are also business owners. Dennis pointed out that this is a pilot project for rural areas, and Comcast could apply the same approach to other rural areas. The County has been supportive of extending broadband into the area. Broadband isn't just a luxury; it is a necessity for residents and businesses alike.

Motion to draft letter (Cropp/Lewis). Motion carried.

**13. Next Agricultural Advisory Committee meeting September 19, 2017. No AAC meeting on August 15, 2017 due to County Agricultural Fair Week.**

There will not be a meeting in August due to the Fair. Everyone should have received the invitation to the Ag Leaders Luncheon.

**14. Additional Item – Strategic Plan for Food Waste Composting**

County DEP has requested assistance from all stakeholders to help them develop a strategic plan for food waste composting, to promote opportunities for advanced composting and to promote diversion of food waste. This is the follow up from Bill 28-16 – developing the strategic plan. On June 26, 2017, Jeremy and Aliza attended the big meeting in Rockville as a follow up to the bill that Aliza testified for on behalf of AAC.

It was raised that food waste needs to be worth a farmer's while – much of it comes is mixed with packaging, broken glass etc. that needs to be removed

**15. Motion to Adjourn (Lechliders/Driscoll) 9:05 pm.**

**Upcoming Meetings and Events:**

**Montgomery Soil Conservation Bd of Supervisors-July 14, 2017 @ 9:00am**

**Agricultural Advisory Committee-Tuesday July 18, 2017 @ 7:00pm**

**Annual Farm Tour and Harvest Sale-July 22 & 23, 2017**

**Council Proclamation-Nat. Farmers Market wk-July 25, 2017 @ 9:30 pm**

**Agricultural Marketing Specialists-July 31, 2017-Southern Maryland**

**10<sup>th</sup> Annual Buy Local Challenge & Celebration July 31, 2017**

**Montgomery County Farm Bureau Bd of Directors-August 1, 2017 @7:00pm**

**COG Regional Agricultural Work Group-August 10, 2017-Montgomery County**

**Montgomery Soil Conservation Bd of Supervisors-August 11, 2017 @ 9:00am**

**MC Agricultural Fair Begins-August 11, 2017**

**Agricultural Leaders Luncheon-Monday August 14, 2017**